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Focus on cars, not gas type

Reducing number of clean fuels wouldn't affect nation's addiction.

By Carl Pope

The truth is there is no short-term fix to the current spike in gas prices.

Changes in the system of cleaner burning fuels, drilling in places such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or offshore, or handing out \$100 rebates wouldn't lower gas prices and wouldn't solve the underlying problem — which is, as President Bush said, America's oil addiction.

The solution certainly isn't to weaken clean air standards for gasoline. Cleaner fuels have helped improve air quality in numerous communities. And while cutting down on the number of these fuels might make life a bit easier for big oil companies, it would have much less of an impact on prices than would curbing our overall gasoline consumption.

Rather than focusing on various types of gas, Congress should focus on the vehicles that could easily be burning less of it.

Sixteen years ago, after a long campaign led by environmental groups, the Senate came within four votes of adopting legislation that would have required automakers to produce vehicles with an average fuel economy of 40 miles per gallon. The world would have been different today: America would be using about half as much gasoline as it does, world oil prices would be dramatically lower, and we would have paid \$150 billion less to foreign oil producers. The U.S. auto industry would be leading, not lagging, in making vehicles with technologies that consumers want. The United States would have embraced the Kyoto accord on global warming because it would have been easy to reach our emissions targets. There would have been considerably less impetus to pursue risky military adventures in the Persian Gulf.

It's too late to avert our crisis. It's not too late to prevent the next energy disaster and tackle global warming. A bipartisan bill sponsored by Reps. Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., and Edward Markey, D-Mass., is a good start, requiring an increase in fuel economy standards from about 25 mpg to 33 mpg.

This is auto mechanics, not rocket science. It is also the single biggest step we can take to reduce oil addiction, save consumers money at the pump and curb global warming.

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